

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 550

By Pitts

A RESOLUTION to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the USO.

WHEREAS, this General Assembly takes great pleasure in paying tribute to a worthy organization that, for the past seventy-five years, has served as a vital bridge between Americans and their military service members, namely the USO; and

WHEREAS, for seventy-five years, the USO, a private nonprofit organization, has proudly served the men and women in the U.S. military, and their families, from the moment they join, through their transition back to their communities; and

WHEREAS, on the local level in 2015 alone, USO Fort Campbell and USO Nashville provided programs and services to nearly 110,000 service members and their families; and

WHEREAS, today's service members need the care, comfort, connection, and support that can only be provided by an organization that is with them at every milepost of their military journey, and the USO is always by their side, continuously adapting to the needs of our men and women in uniform and their families, so they can focus on their very important mission; and

WHEREAS, the USO is a family of volunteers, sustained by the charitable contributions of millions of generous Americans, and its work is America's most powerful expression of gratitude to the men and women who secure our nation's freedoms; and

WHEREAS, with America's military growing rapidly in response to the increasing threat preceding our nation's entry into World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt challenged six private organizations (the YMCA, the YWCA, the National Catholic Community Service, the National Jewish Welfare Board, the Traveler's Aid Association, and the Salvation Army) to handle the on-leave recreation needs of members of the armed forces; these organizations

pooled their resources, and the United Service Organizations, which quickly became known as the USO, was incorporated in New York State on February 4, 1941; and

WHEREAS, on October 30, 1941, USO Camp Shows, Inc., was established to bring live entertainment to American service members, and between 1941 and 1947, more than 7,000 "soldiers in greasepaint" performed an incredible 428,521 USO shows; the USO show concept has endured and continues today as USO Entertainment; and

WHEREAS, in 1947, all USO clubs and facilities were closed, but at the beginning of the Korean War in 1951, the USO was called upon again to provide social, recreational, and entertainment support for America's servicemen and women; and

WHEREAS, Bob Hope took his USO Christmas show to Vietnam for the first time in 1964, starting a tradition that endured into the next decade; at the war's height, forty percent of America's entire overseas forces were in Vietnam, and roughly 5,559 USO performances took place during the Vietnam years; and

WHEREAS, with the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, USO clubs there were closed, but the USO launched into a new era of peacetime service, concluding that "Isolation of the military from civilian influences is not, we believe, in the interest of this nation"; and

WHEREAS, in 1987, under the terms of a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Defense, the USO was recognized as the principal channel representing civilian concern for the U.S. Armed Forces worldwide; and

WHEREAS, the USO opened three centers in Southwest Asia during the Persian Gulf War; and

WHEREAS, in 2003, the USO launched Operation Phone Home, which delivers prepaid international phone cards to deployed service members free of charge; to date, the USO has provided more than 3.2 million free, prepaid international calling cards to better connect service members to their loved ones back home; and

WHEREAS, during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, the USO opened eleven centers in Southwest Asia, including the Pat Tillman Memorial USO Center at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, to provide services and programs to our military forces there; and

WHEREAS, on February 13, 2012, the USO was awarded the National Medal of Arts "for contributions to lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families through the arts"; and

WHEREAS, on February 5, 2013, the USO opened the Warrior and Family Center at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, to support wounded, ill, and injured service members, their family members, and caregivers; and

WHEREAS, on April 1, 2014, the USO Warrior and Family Center on the Naval Support Activity campus in Bethesda, Maryland, was opened; strategically located adjacent to the wounded warrior barracks, known as Tranquility Hall, the center makes it more convenient for wounded, ill, and injured service members and their families to get support during their recovery process; and

WHEREAS, in October 2014, the Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families entertained its 500,000th military family member; and

WHEREAS, on May 11, 2015, the USO established the USO Transition 360 Alliance, an initiative to help military personnel and their families successfully transition back into civilian life after their service ends; and

WHEREAS, on November 12, 2015, the USO and RP/6 cut the ribbon on their co-branded location near Fort Campbell, Kentucky, which is envisioned as a one-stop shop for military transition into the civilian world; and

WHEREAS, as the organization continues to fulfill its mission worldwide, the USO also strengthens America's military service members by keeping them connected to family, home, and country throughout their service to a grateful nation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the USO and commend the administration and volunteers of the USO for their ongoing commitment to the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces who serve our nation so courageously and so selflessly.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.